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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CANBERRA 001453

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [ASEC](#) [EAID](#) [XD](#) [AF](#) [NL](#) [AS](#)

SUBJECT: AFGHAN FM VISITS AUSTRALIA: GOA MOVING TOWARD
DECISION TO DEPLOY PRT

REF: A. CANBERRA 1193 B. IIR 6 805 0203 05 C.

CANBERRA 1098

Classified By: Polcouns Woo Lee. Reason 1.4 (B/D).

1. (U) This is an action request. Please see paragraph 8.

2. (C) Summary: Australia strongly supports the process of bringing stability and democracy to Afghanistan. During his August 17-20 visit to open the new Afghan embassy in Canberra, Foreign Minister Abdullah Abdullah lobbied GOA officials on Australian troop deployments, additional financial assistance, a counterterrorism memorandum of understanding (CT MOU), and a potential Australian Embassy in Kabul. FM Downer said Australia hoped to send a provincial reconstruction team (PRT) to Afghanistan but would need to work out the details first. Australia also agreed to begin discussions on a CT MOU and announced an additional U.S. \$5.3 million in aid. GOA officials seek Washington's views on the way forward in Afghanistan -- specifically, on the post-Bonn Agreement role of the international community and on counter-narcotics strategy. End Summary.

3. (C) Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) India and South Asia Director Peter Howarth told us on August 24 that treatment accorded to the Afghan Foreign Minister during his visit demonstrated the importance the GOA placed on its relationship with Afghanistan. FM Abdullah was treated as a "Guest of the Government," a rare honor which he has received twice since taking office in 2001.

GOA Likely to Send Reconstruction Team

4. (C) After adding another 40 Special Forces troops to the 150 it had committed in July, the GOA reiterated during FM Abdullah's visit that it was also considering sending a 200-strong provincial reconstruction team (PRT) to Afghanistan in mid-2006 for a period of up to two years (reftels A,B). Howarth said that the Cabinet had decided in principle on July 30 to send the team and would make a final decision in early November. The GOA would not send an independent team and would instead look at partnering with the U.S., the UK, or the Netherlands, attempting to maximize the advantages of interoperability and opportunities to use specific Australian expertise at partner locations. Types of troops and deployment details would be dependent on the partner country and location selected. The Dutch need additional troops to complete a PRT and thus are very interested in an Australian partnership, Howarth said.

\$5.3M in New Aid

5. (U) Australia announced U.S. \$5.3M (A\$7M) in new assistance to Afghanistan during FM Abdullah's visit. A \$3.8M (A\$5M) non-earmarked donation will go to the World Bank-administered Afghan Reconstruction Trust Fund, and \$1.5M (A\$2M) will go to the UN Development Program to further support the September National Assembly elections. Australia contributed \$83.3M (A\$110M) towards Afghan reconstruction from September 2001 through June 2005. GOA forward estimates had allocated \$19.7M (A\$26M) for the 2005-06 fiscal year, of which the \$5.3M is the first installment.

CT MOU Discussions

6. (C) One of Abdullah's primary goals for the visit was to start negotiating a counterterrorism memorandum of understanding (CT MOU) with Australia. Howarth confided that Australian officials had not been keen to begin discussions on a CT MOU because they did not believe Afghanistan's institutions were ready for substantive engagement on CT issues. Nevertheless, PM Howard agreed to negotiate the MOU as a symbolic gesture, and DFAT passed a draft model of its CT MOU framework to the Afghans for consideration. Howarth indicated that if PM Howard or FM Downer were to visit Afghanistan in the near future, which was likely due to the recent troop deployments, the signing of the CT MOU would make a timely deliverable. (Note: The GOA signed its 11th bilateral CT MOU with Pakistan during President Musharraf's June visit (ref C).)

Political Will, But No Money for Embassy Kabul

7. (C) Dr. Abdullah's other major request during his visit

was that Australia establish an embassy in Kabul. FM Downer said publicly that given the "intensity of the relationship" Australia had with Afghanistan, the embassy was something the GOA was considering funding in the context of next year's budget. DFAT's Howarth, however, told us that while the issue was "dear to Downer's heart," it was unlikely that DFAT would be able to provide the funding needed to meet the security requirements for an Embassy in Kabul.

Comment and Action Request

18. (C) The increased Australian commitment, both military and political, to Afghanistan is just the latest affirmation that the GOA continues to be one of our strongest allies in the war on terror. When asked by the press why Australia was sending more troops to Afghanistan, PM Howard replied, "The Australian national interest is in making sure that the democratic Afghanistan continues. If the democratic experiment in Afghanistan fails then that's a huge victory for terrorism." DFAT's Howarth was cautiously hopeful that the upcoming elections in Afghanistan would contribute to the stability of the country. With the elections marking the end of the Bonn Agreement, he asked what Washington's views were on the future structure of the relationship between the international community and Afghanistan. Howarth also expressed concern about the illegal narcotics situation and asked for best practice information from the USG to assist in establishing the GOA's own counter-narcotics policy for Afghanistan. He was particularly interested in lessons learned by the U.S. in Afghanistan and Colombia. Howarth also expressed interest in USG thinking on Pakistan's "end game" in Afghanistan, saying he found Islamabad's treatment of the Taliban and other transnational fighters "inconsistent." Post would appreciate Department guidance to assist in responding to Howarth's questions.

STANTON.